

# KINCORA

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

By

LADY GREGORY

NEW YORK

Published by

JOHN QUINN

1905

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# KINCORA

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# KINCORA

## PERSONS

BRIAN, King of Munster.

MALACHI, High King of Ireland.

MAELMORA, King of Leinster.

GORMLEITH, wife to the High King, sister of Maelmora,  
mother of Sitric.

MURROUGH, Brian's son.

SITRIC, leader of the Danes.

BRENNAIN, {  
DERRICK, } servants to Brian.

RURY, servant to Malachi.

PHELAN, servant to Maelmora.

MAIRE, daughter to Brennain.

BRODAR.

A DANE.

AOIBHELL, a spirit.

## PROLOGUE

# PROLOGUE

## PROLOGUE

SCENE—*A wood. Brian seen lying asleep on the ground. Enter two men with swords, their cloaks wrapped round their heads.*

FIRST MAN.—Are you here, Brian? Here he is sleeping. We should waken him now, but he has the look of being very tired.

SECOND MAN.—Tired and worn out, and no wonder—a young lad that was used to lie on the pillars of a king's house, to be laying his head on the hard knotty roots of trees.

FIRST MAN.—Fighting with the Danes through the daytime and resting on the ground by night; or fighting through the night time when he failed to harm them in the day. And not one of his own with him to give him a hand. It is a lonesome life he has.

SECOND MAN.—He will be more lonesome again after a while, when the whole of us are killed. What way can a score of men drive a whole army out of Ireland?

FIRST MAN.—If anyone can do it he will do it. Leave him there; we need not waken him till the rising of the sun. He will be tired enough before the day is over.

(*They go out. Aoibhell appears.*)

AOIBHELL.—Awake, young Brian! Brian, son of Cennedigh, awake!

BRIAN.—Who is calling me? Are the enemy coming? Is it time for the fight?

AOIBHELL.—I do not call you to battle, but to peace.

BRIAN.—Who are you? Where do you come from?

AOIBHELL.—I am Aoibhell of the Grey Rock, the helper of your race. I am come to bid you give up the sweetheart you

have chosen, that hard sweetheart, Ireland. Come to me in place of her and I will bring you into the hidden houses of the hills. I will give you love; age will never fall on you as it has fallen upon me.

BRIAN.—I will not go with you; I will not give up Ireland. For it is a habit of my race to fight and to die, but it never was their habit to see shame or oppression put on their country by any man on earth.

AOIBHELL.—Those that serve Ireland take for their lot lasting battles, lasting quarrels. They are building and ever building, and ever and always ruin comes upon them before the house is built. Those that should be most their friends turn to be most their enemies, till the heart grows dry with bitterness, dry as the heads of the mountains under the summer heat. Come to me and leave her, Brian, young Brian.

BRIAN.—Go from me, Aoibhell! Go back to your hidden house! I will never break my faith with the sweetheart I have chosen nor turn from her service till she can lift up her head in the sight of the whole world!

*Curtain*

## ACT I

# KINCORA

BEFORE GLENMAMA

## ACT I

SCENE—*A hall in Brian's house at Kincora. Malachi and Maelmora at a table; their servants standing behind their chairs. Brian's servants behind his empty chair. Brian at the window, looking out, with back to audience. Murrough looking on. Maire working at an embroidery frame.*

MAELMORA (*giving a paper to Malachi*).—See, I have written it all here, High King. (*Reads*) Submission made by Sitric, head of the Danes, for himself and the whole of his army—

MALACHI.—I know, I know; let him read it himself when he comes. It is time for him to be here to put his name to it.

MAELMORA.—He will be here before the fall of day.

MALACHI.—This is a great work we have done this day; and though I am High King, it is the man in the window that has done it. The Danes binding themselves to quit the country, and Brian and myself and yourself, Maelmora, at peace with one another.

MAELMORA.—It was time, indeed, for peace. The whole of my own province of Leinster is wracked and destroyed with the war.

MALACHI.—The rest of Ireland is no better. Fighting against the Gall from morning to night, and from night to morning making attacks on one another.

BRIAN (*coming to the table and laying his hand on it*). I do

## KINCORA

not see Sitric coming. I am impatient for this submission to be signed.

MALACHI.—He cannot be far off now, Brian.

BRIAN.—I cannot be sure, until he has put his name to it, that peace has come at last.

MALACHI.—No one would think that so good a fighter as you, Brian, had his mind so much set on peace.

BRIAN.—My fathers were fighters, and I have followed their trade; Lugaith, son of Aengus; Cathal, son of Aedh; Corc, son of Anluan; Lorcan, son of Luchta; Cennedigh, son of Lorcan; they lived and died fighting in defence of their own home and of Munster. It is time now for the race of Lugaith to turn from war to peace.

MALACHI.—You can do as you will. No man that ever saw you in battle will say you turned from war through any fear or slackness, for fear is a thing that never came into the one house with you.

BRIAN—I fought for Ireland when young boys of my age were at the hurling. I have done for her all that war can do. It is peace she is in want of now, to see her young men at the sickle in place of girls, and her strong men breaking the wild ground for seed. Fighting, fighting from Samhain to harvest—no time, no time for any other thing. I would have time now to forgive my enemies, and to make my peace with God.

MALACHI.—There was a good saint spoiled in you, Brian, when you took to the sword instead of the crozier.

MURROUGH.—It might have been better for yourself, Malachi, if my father had never meddled with a sword.

MALACHI.—Listen to the crowing of the young cock! We are done with all that now, Murrough. Springtime is come; and the daws are mated to-day that were pecking at one another yesterday. Brian (*turning towards the window*). My mind will not be at rest till Sitric comes.

MAELMORA.—I have answered for my nephew Sitric. He gives in altogether.

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MALACHI.—He was forced to give in when you took away the help of Leinster from him.

MAELMORA.—I will go out by the Hill of the Grey Rock to meet him if he is coming by that road. I promised him a good welcome from you, Brian.

BRIAN.—You were right in that. Go, Murrough, with Maelmora. I myself will go towards the weir; he may be coming from the south.

MALACHI.—I will go with you, Brian. We can be looking at the colts in the river-meadows as we go.

BRIAN (*to servants*).—Make the table ready, Brennain. When Sitric comes, we have but to sign the peace and to sit down to supper.

(*Brian and Murrough go out. Malachi is following them, when Maelmora stops him.*)

MAELMORA.—Where is my sister Gormleith?

MALACHI.—She is far enough away, at home.

MAELMORA.—Did you ask her to come with you?

MALACHI.—Did I ask a swarm of bees to come into the house to help to make the peace?

MAELMORA.—She might like this peace for her son Sitric's sake.

MALACHI.—Believe me, we are best without her.

MAELMORA.—That may be. She has a wild heart yet.

(*He and Malachi go out. Servants come forward. Maire goes to the window and stands looking after the kings.*)

DERRICK.—Malachi the High King, king of the whole North! Brian, king of the whole South! Meddling with one another no more than the white and the yolk of an egg! Peace as sound and as round as the eggshell itself! Peace forever in Ireland and in Kincora!

BRENNAIN.—If you were not a poet, Derrick, I would say you were a fool.

PHELAN.—Why would you call Derrick a fool?

BRENNAIN.—For thinking, Phelan, that words can stop an

eggshell from being cracked or a peace from being broken. If truces and agreements are eggs, it is my belief there is some clucking hen, some mother of mischief, always at roost overhead in Ireland that will pitch on them and hatch them till they are pecked to pieces by their own young ones from within. Here, Maire, give me the plates. (*She gives them and he begins putting them on the table.*) Peaces and treaties! I would make no treaty with the Gall, but to strike their head off!

DERRICK (*taking parchment, ink, etc., from table*).—You are always ready to put ridicule on what I say, Brennain. But I know well, whatever may have happened at other times, this peace will never be broken. Who is there to break it?

RURY.—The Danes will not break it, anyway, and they as they are, not daring to let a squeak out of them. Keeping their heads under water they are, like a hunted otter in a stream.

PHELAN.—Whoever breaks the peace it will not be my own master, Maelmora. Now the Danes are beaten, he has no mind to be beaten along with them, and in my opinion he is right.

RURY.—Whoever may break it, it will not be my master, Malachi. He has fought through the whole of his life. He should have time now to train his three-year-olds, and to mind Gormleith, his wife.

DERRICK.—Whoever starts a new war, it will not be Brian.

RURY.—I suppose not. It is time for him to make his soul, after fighting like Malachi through the whole of his lifetime.

DERRICK.—The whole country will shine out now, the path of white angels to the western world! (*Sings*)

Golden bridles, silver bridles,  
Coming up along the strand;  
Keening's not used or treachery  
In the tilled familiar land!

MAIRE (*from the window*).—Quiet, Derrick; leave off singing. There is a boat come to the shore—there is some queen-woman stepping out of it.

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BRENNAIN.—What sort is she?

MAIRE.—She is tall, and has rich clothing, and there is some shining thing on her head.

RURY (*going to window*).—The Lord be between us and harm! It is Queen Gormleith!

DERRICK (*coming to window*).—The High King's wife!

BRENNAIN.—What does she want coming into Munster?

MAIRE (*shivering*).—I hope she will bring no harm on our king!

PHELAN.—Malachi thought she would stop at home, keeping her maids to their needles. It is time for him to have got better sense.

BRENNAIN.—What did he want marrying her? I would never like to meddle with a woman that had been married to a Dane.

(*Gormleith comes in and looks round. All the servants come forward and bow obsequiously.*)

DERRICK (*pulling forward a chair*).—Welcome to Kincora, Queen Gormleith!

GORMLEITH (*sitting down*).—I thank you. I thought to find all the kings here. Is the business finished that brought them together? Is not that Phelan, my brother's servant? And there is Rury, my husband's servant. Have the High King and the King of Leinster put their names to this peace?

RURY.—The peace is made, Queen, but the names are not put to it yet. Malachi and Brian are kings of the North and of the South. But Malachi has the High Kingship yet.

GORMLEITH.—That is a fine peace! What has delayed the signing of it?

PHELAN.—They are waiting for Sitric. They are gone out to meet him. Maelmora brought his submission; he is coming to put his name to the treaty. If he does not come soon, the supper will be spoiled.

GORMLEITH.—So my son Sitric has submitted! He never told me. He would not tell it to me. Sitric under Brian and

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under Malachi! (*Brennain goes to the door.*) You are going to call in the kings?

BRENNAIN.—I am, Queen. I will bring them in to welcome you.

GORMLEITH.—Do not hurry them for my sake. I am well content to rest for a while in this beautiful Kincora, that is folded between the river and the hills.

BRENNAIN.—It is fair enough, fair enough. We have not the hill of Tara or of Almuin.

GORMLEITH.—Brian has the great river to carry his orders. He has bound it to his service as far as the wide sea. And you have what is better than hills or rivers; you have the most plentiful house in all Ireland, your king is the best served, his people have the greatest name for bravery.

DERRICK.—That is true. MacLiagh, the king's poet, has made a song about that.

GORMLEITH.—The best songs in all Ireland are made in Kincora.

RURY.—Derrick himself is a good songmaker.

DERRICK.—Just middling. But I will make a song about your coming, Queen, will be remembered to the end of life and time. It will have in it the stir of a battle, the fighting of the sun against the cold, and of the stars against the dark.

GORMLEITH.—It will be a good poem. The High King has no one at his court able to make a poem like that.

PHELAN.—We have poets at the court of the King of Leinster—and feasts.

GORMLEITH.—That court is like my own, being my brother's. You would not have me praise my own cradle. But I have often praised my brother's faithful servant. (*Gives him her hand. He kisses it.*)

BRENNAIN (*to Maire, aside*).—Go, Maire, and see are the kings coming. This queen has too much of bee's honey in her mouth. (*Maire goes out.*)

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GORMLEITH.—I have stopped your work. Go on making the table ready.

BRENNAIN.—All is ready, Queen. We have but to put the seats and to bring in the dishes.

GORMLEITH.—You are standing idle, Rury. Is there no work for you to do?

RURY.—I can be putting the chair ready for the High King. (*Pulls a chair forward.*)

GORMLEITH.—Do not put that for him. That is King Brian's chair.

RURY.—It is the custom to give the best chair to the High King of Ireland.

GORMLEITH.—It was the custom. But remember the High King is not above King Brian now. He is but his equal. They are the kings of the North and South.

RURY.—I would never give in to putting Malachi below any other man.

PHELAN.—Where should I put the King of Leinster's chair?

BRIAN.—Put it there—to King Brian's left hand. That is it. A little farther down.

GORMLEITH.—You were putting it too close, Phelan. King Brian is such a great man now, there must be the length of a sword left between him and any other king of a province.

PHELAN.—My master is good enough to sit close up to any of the kings of the world.

GORMLEITH (*to Brennain*).—You must make these forgetful men remember that their masters have a master themselves now in King Brian.

BRENNAIN.—So they have, so they have! Kincora will be the capital of Ireland.

MAIRE (*coming in*).—I see Sitric and the King of Leinster coming over the hill.

BRENNAIN.—It is best for us to be putting the food on the table. Go, Maire, for the dishes. (*She goes out.*) Sitric will sign his name with the less delay if he sees the fat of the mutton hardening.

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GORMLEITH (*who has gone to window, turning from it*).—They are a long way off. You have time. Be sure that the best dish is set before the greatest of the kings! (*She turns again to window.*)

MAIRE (*coming in*).—Here is the king's dish, the round of the beef.

BRENNAIN.—I will put it here before King Brian.

RURY.—It is before Malachi it should be put. The best dish should be put before the High King.

BRENNAIN.—You heard what Queen Gormleith herself said, that Brian is as good now as Malachi.

(*Gormleith turns and leans against side of window, listening with enjoyment.*)

RURY.—He is not as good as the King of Tara; and he never will be as good. Put the beef here.

MAIRE.—Here is as good a dish—a roasted quarter of a boar.

RURY.—We have plenty of pigs in the North. A pig is no great dish for a king. The beef is the more honorable dish.

BRENNAIN.—If it is, it is to the most honorable man it is going.

RURY.—How do you make that out? The High King is the most honorable man!

BRENNAIN.—The High King! Where would he be but for Brian!

RURY.—What are you talking about?

BRENNAIN.—I tell you, if it was not for Brian taking the Danes in hand the way he did, it is hares of the wilderness Malachi might be milking to-day in place of cows!

RURY.—Brian! Where was Brian the day Malachi took the golden collar from the big Dane? Answer me that!

BRENNAIN.—That Malachi may be choked with that same collar before the size of my nail of this beef will go down his throat until he has asked it of Brian first!

(*Gormleith claps her hands.*)

RURY.—Asked it of Brian!

BRENNAIN.—Asked it and begged it, the way a queen's lapdog begs at the table.

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DERRICK.—Put the beef before Queen Gormleith's chair, and everyone will be satisfied.

PHELAN.—It is not I will be satisfied till I know what share of the meat the King of Leinster is to get! It is another round of the beef should be put before him!

BRENNAIN.—The next time the King of Leinster comes here he will find his fill of beef before him—his own cattle that will be coming from now till then as tribute from the traitors of Leinster.

PHELAN.—Holy Saint Bridgit! Listen what they are saying of your own province!

RURY.—Brennain is right. Tripe and cowheels and pigs' crubeens are good enough for that troop, and too good!

PHELAN.—O let me out of this! Tripe and crubeens and all this plenty in the house! I will call to all the poets of Leinster to put a curse upon Kincora!

DERRICK.—My grief that I have not time to sharpen this knife! (Seizes one.) No matter! It is on your own bones I will sharpen it! (All seize knives and threaten each other. Gormleith laughs and claps her hands.)

MAIRE.—Quiet, quiet. Here is the King of Leinster. Here are Murrough and Sitric!

(They enter. Gormleith comes down and puts an arm round Sitric and Maelmora.)

MURROUGH.—What is this kennel of fighting hounds? Brennain, what is the meaning of this uproar?

BRENNAIN.—It is these others made an attack on me. I am for quiet and for getting ready the table!

PHELAN.—Taking the best beef he was! Leaving my master to the last!

DERRICK.—Rury wanted the best of the chairs for Malachi!

RURY.—Keep your chair! Malachi is master wherever he sits!

MURROUGH.—Malachi master here! That is news, indeed!

GORMLEITH (to Maelmora).—Some say he is uppermost, and some say Brian; but the King of Leinster is put in the lowest place of all!

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MAELMORA (*to Murrough*).—Do you think me so much below Brian because I have consented to make peace with him?

MURROUGH.—You have consented to send tribute. It is not the one who is uppermost that sends tribute.

MAELMORA.—If Brian had spoken like that I would not have consented to send it. I have a mind to keep it back even now.

MURROUGH.—As you will, King. If we send our men to look for it, you yourself will have forced it on us.

MAELMORA.—I can hold my province against the men of Kincora! Let them fish and shiver like cranes in frost before they will see one head of cattle coming from Leinster.

SITRIC (*to Maelmora*).—I thought it was to make a peace you brought me here. It seems now you are making yourself ready for a battle.

GORMLEITH.—That should be good news. You are young to give in to peace like a monk or a bishop.

SITRIC.—They have deceived me, calling this a treaty. It is a bad day that brought me to Kincora without my hand on the sword.

MURROUGH.—If you had come with your hand on the sword it is likely you would have got a welcome that would have kept you in Kincora to the day of judgment!

SITRIC.—It is a pity we did not smoke out this den long ago!

MURROUGH.—It is you yourself are smoked out of your den to-day and out of the hole where you were hiding!

GORMLEITH (*to Maelmora*).—It was you who brought Sitric here.

MAELMORA.—Keep a quiet tongue, Murrough. Sitric will not take from you what he might take from Brian.

SITRIC.—I will take no high words from Brian or any other man, whatever you yourself may be in the habit of taking from him.

MAELMORA.—I will take nothing from him and he will get nothing from me. I swear I will send no tribute to Brian! I would sooner die. (*Draws sword.*)

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MURROUGH.—Many a man has died who set himself up against King Brian! (*Draws sword.*)

BRENNAIN.—That is good talk! Brian has a long hand!

DERRICK.—Murrough and Brian are the two hawks of battle of the Gael!

PHELAN.—We will turn you into jackdaws! We will change your note for you!

RURY.—Malachi and the Hill of Tara!

DERRICK.—Munster and the Dalcassians!

PHELAN.—No tribute! Hold the cattle!

RURY.—Tara for victory!

DERRICK.—Brian and Murrough!

PHELAN.—Down with Kincora!

BRENNAIN.—Drive out the traitors!

(*Brian and Malachi come in.*)

MAIRE.—The King! (*Servants fall back.*)

BRIAN (*sternly*).—Swords out in this house! (*To Sitric and Maelmora*) I ask your pardon. My son is young and hot. He should be back in the schools.

MURROUGH (*sullenly, putting sword in sheath*).—It was their fault. They roused me with their words. They said they were above you. They said—I forget now what they said.

BRIAN.—Shut your ears, Murrough, when sharp words are spoken within your own walls. It is best not to hear what you must not answer.

(*Gormleith comes forward.*)

MALACHI.—Queen Gormleith!

GORMLEITH.—It is a surprise to you to see me?

MALACHI.—No great surprise. I have not often known a battle, Queen, where you were not looking on from some perch or another.

BRIAN.—Is this Queen Gormleith? (*Takes her hand and kisses it.*)

MALACHI.—It is herself. Queen Gormleith that I brought back

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BRIAN.—You did well for Ireland doing that. I am sorry, indeed, Queen, you have had so rough a welcome in my house.

GORMLEITH.—I have had the best of welcomes. This is no sleepy place. I have found the stir and the high hearts I looked for in a king's house.

MALACHI.—I would not wonder, Queen, if it was your breath helped me to blow this wisp alight. You will do some day, with your lightness and laughter, what will bring great trouble into the houses of kings.

BRIAN.—There could be no unkind thought beneath such high beauty.

GORMLEITH.—I thank you, King.

BRIAN.—My people are rough. There has been no queen in this house since my own young Connacht wife, Murrough's mother, died from me. A house without a queen grows to be like a windy hillside after the hunting, where orders are loud-voiced, and service is rough, and hounds are unloosed and snatching.

GORMLEITH.—I think that rough service well befits a king's house.

BRIAN.—A queen's voice would turn it all to gentleness. It is seldom we hear a woman's voice in this hall, unless it may be in the keening, when the men of our race are brought back cold and dumb from their victories.

GORMLEITH.—I think you have indeed the right house for a king.

MALACHI.—Let us waste no more time. Here now is Sitric. Let him put his name to the peace, and the supper will turn the whole company to better humour. Good meat and good drink are the best peacemakers.

BRIAN.—My welcome to you, Sitric. Here is the parchment. Maelmora, your uncle wrote down the terms of submission you

had agreed to. You have but to put your name. The hostages can be sent to-morrow.

(*Sitric is silent.*)

BRIAN.—Will you read it? Or will you be content with what Maelmora has written?

MALACHI.—He put in the writing that you and your army would agree to quit Ireland, or to live in it without arms, under tribute to myself and to Brian.

SITRIC.—I will not sign it.

BRIAN.—Not sign it! Why is this?

MALACHI.—It was you yourself sent in your submission. Why should you draw back now?

SITRIC.—Hot words have been said to me that I am not used to put up with.

BRIAN.—This is Murrough's folly. I ask your pardon for it, and he will ask your pardon.

SITRIC.—He need not do that. I have made up my mind. I will agree to no submission.

MALACHI.—What is it you have against it?

SITRIC.—I will not give in to Brian. I will not leave the country at Brian's bidding. I will not bid my men to give up their arms. I will bid them to go on fighting to the last.

BRIAN.—This is folly, Sitric. You could not stand against us alone through the length of a winter day.

MAELMORA.—He will not be alone. I give up my share in the peace. I would sooner be with the Danes than with Brian of the Tributes!

MALACHI (*in a tone of vexation*).—How hot you are for fighting, young men! Hot blood, hot blood, and all our trouble gone to loss! If Brian was of my mind, he would have let the hot blood out of you when he saw you weakening; and he might have got some ease and comfort for himself and for me. (*To Brian*) Let us offer something—let them do what they like with Leinster if they do not meddle with us. A war would be a

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heavy business. You were saying a while ago what a great thing peace would be for Ireland.

BRIAN.—Entire peace is a great thing, but a half peace is no better worth winning than the half of the living child the Jewish mothers were fighting for.

MALACHI.—It is my opinion you will not see entire peace and the end of war in Ireland, till the worms have been made an end of by the thrushes, or the clouds by the wind, or the nights by the long days.

BRIAN.—I tell you I will make no settlement that leaves any one of the provinces a nest and a breeding ground for the enemies and the ill-wishers of the rest of Ireland. It is certain that Ireland must be as free as God made her before she can be as happy as He saw her in the making. Sitric must sign this (*holds out parchment*) or make himself ready to fight.

SITRIC (*takes parchment, looks at it a moment, then cuts it in two with his sword, and throws down the pieces violently*).—There is an end of your peace!

BRIAN (*drawing his sword*).—Come out then, old comrade! I thought to let you sleep for a while, but the day's work is not over yet. (*Unbuckles sheath*.) But this is what I will never make use of again so long as there is so much as a threat of trouble or treachery in any one of the provinces of Ireland. (*Throws away sheath*.)

SITRIC (*Flinging down sheath*).—There is mine, till I come to look for it again!

MAELMORA.—And mine! (*Flings down sheath. He and Sitric go to the door*.)

GORMLEITH.—The sword in the hand and the sheath on the floor! That is a good sight in a king's house! (*To Brian*) War is best! War is best! When the swords of kings grow rusty in the sheath, the height of the noontide will be over for the world!

*Curtain*

## ACT II

# KINCORA

## ACT II

AFTER GLENMAMA

SCENE—*The same hall at Kincora. Heap of spoils on the floor. Brennan has just come in with Phelan, who is bound. Derrick and Maire at window, waving branches.*

DERRICK.—A welcome to the army of the Dalcassians! A welcome to the army that put down the Danes! A welcome to Brian! The branch to King Brian! (Throws it. Turns to Maire.) Come to the door. The King is coming. (He and Maire step down and see Brennan.)

BRENNAIN.—The branch to myself. What do you say to me, taking this prisoner in the battle? I drove him before me all the way from Glenmama. It's the Leinster men that can run well!

MAIRE.—The King of Leinster's servant!

BRENNAIN (*pushing Phelan*).—Come on here. Jackdaws are we? You'll change our note for us? Give me a wisp of lighted straw till I make him shout for King Brian!

DERRICK.—That's right! That's right! That's the way we're bringing back traitors to Kincora that went boasting out of it.

PHELAN.—If I did boast, you needn't put the blame on me. When the dog smells a bone, the dog's tail must wag. I do but wag as my master pleases.

BRENNAIN.—It is we ourselves are gnawing the bone now. Look at these spoils. Coming in since morning they are; the whole of the court is full of them. Did ever anyone see such

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riches? Robbed by the Danes they were from every dun in Ireland, and from the hidden houses of the Sidhe.

(Enter Brian with shield; he wears a helmet.)

MAIRE.—My hundred welcomes to you, Brian of the victories!

BRIAN.—I thank you, Maire.

DERRICK.—My thousand welcomes to yourself and your whole army. I am making a song for you, King, about the great victory of Glenmama. A song with as many verses in it as my fingers and toes, and a great deed in every verse.

BRIAN.—Let it be a good one, Derrick; for if I have my way, it will be the last battle song ever made in my lifetime.

DERRICK.—Good is it? The words will come as fast as the running of the Danes before you—galloping, gander-winged, grasshopping. Making for the sea they were, the same as gulls. I will put the screaming of gulls in my poem—sky-sailing, sad-sounding, sea-searching.

BRIAN.—That is enough. I have had my fill of battles. (He sits down and takes off helmet.)

MAIRE.—Let me put away your sword, King.

BRIAN (*takes arm-ring from the heap of spoils*).—Take that ring from the spoils, Maire. This war is over; but all Ireland is not at peace. I must not put away my sword till a girl like you can travel through the whole country wearing a ring like that, and no one lay a hand on her or on it.

MAIRE.—It is too much for me, King.

BRENNAIN.—Murrough sent to ask when you would judge the prisoners.

BRIAN.—Not yet. I will wait for Malachi. He is on his way.

BRENNAIN.—What will I do with the spoils?

BRIAN.—Make three shares of them. A share for the High King, and a share for the men of learning, and a share for Kincora.

BRENNAIN.—I will; I will keep the best for ourselves.

BRIAN.—The best must go to the High King.

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BRENNAIN.—It is yourself should be High King, Brian, after this great victory. All Ireland is saying it.

BRIAN.—The whole world may say it before it will make me break my peace with Malachi.

BRENNAIN.—Malachi is all for ease. It is not Malachi that will master the five provinces, tearing and spitting at one another the way they are.

DERRICK.—Take the High Kingship, Brian, and they will be like the five fingers of the one hand, the five features of the King's face, the five white leaves of an apple blossom!

BRENNAIN.—It is what they are now, five wild cats struggling in a bag, and four times five claws on every one of them.

(*A clattering of horses is heard.*)

BRENNAIN.—That is the sound of the High King's horses.

BRIAN.—He is come to judge the prisoners of Glenmama. Let them be brought here now.

(*Exeunt servants. Enter Malachi.*)

MALACHI.—I was delayed in coming. Your Munster roads are good innkeepers. They were not willing to let the wheels of my chariot go from them.

BRIAN.—You are in time, High King. I have given no judgment yet. I have sent for the prisoners.

MALACHI.—We will show the Danes their leader will get the same reward from us as common men.

(*Enter Brennain and Derrick.*)

BRENNAIN.—Here are the prisoners, King. (*Enter Murrough with Sitric and Maelmora in bonds.*)

MALACHI.—Is Maelmora taken? That is good news. They said he could not be found. I thought he had escaped from the battle.

BRENNAIN.—It was Murrough took him, High King! Hiding he was in a yew tree. Murrough dragged him out of it the same as a wren's nest.

BRIAN.—Enough. We do not boast in time of victory.

DERRICK (*to Brennain*).—Mind yourself. It is not mannerly

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for you to be talking about that yew tree before the King of Leinster.

MURROUGH.—The men of my army are waiting outside to bring these men to their punishment.

BRIAN.—What punishment would you give them?

MURROUGH.—How did the Danes treat their prisoners? How did the King of Leinster treat his rebels?

BRIAN.—Have they any excuse to make for themselves?

MURROUGH.—They have made none to me.

MALACHI.—They have none to make.

BRIAN.—What have you to say in your own defence?

MURROUGH.—You hear, Maelmora and Sitric, what the King is asking?

SITRIC.—I will say nothing. I fought, and I have lost.

MAELMORA.—I will say nothing. Nothing I could say would change your mind.

BRIAN.—What do you say, Brennain? You have seen many prisoners brought into Kincora.

BRENNAIN.—I say a dead wolf will worry no sheep, and a dead fox will kill no lambs.

MALACHI.—That is so. Take them to their death. They can make no complaint.

BRIAN.—Wait. These are not all. Murrough, bring in the last prisoner that was taken.

MALACHI.—What other is there high enough to be judged with kings?

*(Brian lifts his hand for silence. Murrough brings in Gormleith, bound. Brian stands up.)*

BRIAN.—Put a chair for Queen Gormleith. *(Chair placed. Gormleith stands, taking no notice.)*

MALACHI.—Have you been brought down, Crow of Battle?

MURROUGH.—The queen was taken in the fight among Sitric's men. This broken spear was the last of her weapons.

MALACHI.—Whatever punishment and whatever judgment may fall on Sitric and on Maelmora, a heavier judgment must surely

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fall on this woman, who left a woman's work, and was the very seed and root of the war.

GORMLEITH.—Is it Malachi, and not Brian, that gives judgment in this hall of Kincora?

BRIAN.—It is not for me, Queen, to judge the High King's wife.

GORMLEITH.—Am I the High King's wife? Is not that story at an end, and that treaty broken?

MALACHI.—It is broken, surely. When I knew you had gone out of my house to take the side of my enemies, my gates were shut against you. You were shut out of my house and my kingdom.

GORMLEITH.—I made no secret war. Did you think I would creep back to ask for shelter?

MALACHI.—My men had orders not to spare you. No one in Ireland would have dared give you shelter if you had escaped from the battle. But you have not escaped. You have come to your death, and you have brought your son and your brother to their death.

MURROUGH.—I have other witnesses that saw her fighting in the battle.

GORMLEITH.—You need not bring them. I was there. I fought beside my son against Malachi and the men of Meath.

BRIAN (*to Malachi*).—What was it turned the Queen to be your enemy?

MALACHI.—I know of no cause, unless she had some lover.

GORMLEITH.—Some lover! The Danes could tell you I would rather lay my lips to a blue breast-plate than to the whitest skin in the world.

MALACHI.—That may be so. It is hard to know with such a woman when there is a kiss behind her schemes, or a scheme behind her kisses. I am done with you now and forever.

GORMLEITH.—I had no lover, Brian. I never came yet to the man I could give my love to—the man that could bind me to peace.

MALACHI.—I think, indeed, that man is still unborn.

GORMLEITH.—There may be such a man. A man that has sent his name out like the shout of a great army; that could quiet my hands with his strong hand; that could quiet my heart, filling it with pride of him, and my mouth, filling it with praise of him.

BRIAN.—The High King of Ireland should be such a man.

GORMLEITH.—His time is over. He is for ease; I would have no time for rest. He is for the jesters; I am for the proud songs of heroes. He is for the fatness of the barley in the ear; I am for the redness and the ferment of the ale.

BRIAN.—That need not have driven a wife to battle.

GORMLEITH.—Would you have me sit at home, and use false words, and wish for his death? That is not the lesson I learned from the Danes.

MALACHI.—I will send her to her death. There will be no peace or ease in the country till then.

GORMLEITH.—You are my judge, King Brian! I am sister of a king. I was a queen among the Danes.

BRIAN.—You have lost the rights of a queen, taking arms like any fighting man.

GORMLEITH.—There were high-hearted kings, and high-hearted queens in the old days, that went side by side into the battle. It is from such kings and such queens that you and I are come.

BRIAN.—The old days are gone by. The sign of the Cross is upon us. We must bring the world to peace.

GORMLEITH.—What is this peace you talk of? Is it so great a thing? There are some beyond the world that know better. In peace the little men grow many, and the great men lessen, and the high heart beats slowly, and the trader holds the sway. When the world is changed like that it will be no place for high-hearted men, no place for yourself, Brian.

MALACHI.—Have done listening to words, Brian, and give your judgment, or I myself will give it.

BRIAN.—Have you anything to ask, Queen, or to plead?

GORMLEITH.—I will ask for no mercy for myself, or my son,

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or my brother. We fought and we are beaten. The men of our race know how to die—yet—it was my doing—Sitric is young—if it were Murrough—

MAELMORA.—We are not children. We can answer for ourselves. We ask no mercy.

SITRIC.—I will not shelter behind a woman. Keep silence, Queen.

MALACHI.—Brian will give a right judgment. He has never spared the enemies of Ireland.

BRIAN (*standing up*).—That is a true word. I have never spared them.

MALACHI.—Ireland can have no worse enemies than these.

BRIAN.—You hear, Queen, what the High King says. Ireland has had no worse enemies than these. My people have called them wolves and foxes; and they have earned that name, for they have torn and reddened the white fleece of Ireland. It was my heart's desire to mend that torn fleece; to gather up that ragged wool; to weave it into a border fit for the cloak of the King of Heaven. I made a peace. I thought to fill Ireland with joy; to make of her a brimming cup at the feast of the angels. That cup was overturned; that heavenly cloak was torn; that peace was broken. It was broken by you. The keening and the treachery were brought back again.

MURROUGH.—I will bring in my men to take them away. Let them be buried in the place of traitors where the sun will not shine on their grave.

BRIAN.—Stop! I have given no judgment yet. Maelmora, King of Leinster, is guilty of treachery to me, and to the High King, and to Ireland. Sitric the Gall is guilty of the great robbery and oppression he and his people have done upon Ireland. Queen Gormleith claims her share in the war—and yet—I will leave them their life and their freedom.

MURROUGH.—You will let them go?

MALACHI.—If Brian had not said that, I would say a fool had said it.

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BRIAN.—I will take hostages; but I will let them go. I have shed blood all through my life; I will shed no more of it.

MALACHI.—If you let these men go, there will be shedding of blood again.

BRIAN.—They have learned their lesson. They know their master. I am not willing to put a sod on the mouth or a clod in the hand of any man that may be on my side yet against the enemies of Ireland.

MURROUGH.—Sitric is no Irishman.

BRIAN.—His mother is of the blood of the kings of Leinster.

MURROUGH.—His mother! This is her work. If you let them go, the army of the Dalcassians will not let them go.

BRIAN.—Do you think to force me, my boy, with this *threat* of an army?

MALACHI.—It is you yourself that are forcing a peace.

BRIAN.—If I force a peace now, I have the right to do it, for I forced on war often enough. It was I myself avenged my brother Mahon. My fathers avenged themselves on their enemies; and the sons of those enemies avenged themselves on the men of our race, death answering to death from side to side like words sung by the clerks at the Mass. But I will put an end to that. I have never been strong enough to spare life until now. I have only been strong enough to take life. I have had only the strength of my sword. Now I have the strength of my great name and my will. I will make an end of quarrels. I will cut these bonds. (*Takes sword from table and cuts rope that binds Gormleith.*)

MALACHI (*starting up*).—I will not have them loosed.

BRIAN.—The Queen is free. Murrough, cut those other bonds. Leave them to me.

MALACHI (*seizing Murrough, who is reluctantly drawing sword*).—Leave them to me; leave them to me. It is not for you to free them.

GORMLEITH (*taking Brian's sword from the table and quickly*

*(cutting their bonds).*—You left the judgment to Brian! We took the first King of the world for our judge!

MALACHI.—I have all Ireland in my care. I will not let these traitors go. (*Moves towards them.*)

BRIAN.—Stay, King! I will not give them up! They are in my house. I have given them my word. There are no saplings in a walled garden safer than these two men. There is no blossom on the highest branch of the woods safer from rough hands than this Queen.

MALACHI.—The right to free them is with those that took them. The heads of armies who fought as well as you, have the right over prisoners taken in battle. These are not Kings now, but shamed and beaten men.

BRIAN.—I say they are Kings. Maelmora, I give you back your own Kingdom of Leinster. Sitric, I give you back your own town of Ath Cliath to keep in stewardship for me and for Ireland. Murrough, give them back their arms. (*Murrough gives them their swords and shields.*)

MALACHI.—Then I use my right that is higher than yours—my right as High King of all Ireland to take these men, Kings though they may be, and this Queen, into my own hands, and to send them for judgment to the council of Tara.

MURROUGH.—King Brian's is the greater right. All Ireland knows he has the power, if he would use it, to put you out of Tara to-day. It is only by his will and his kindness you are wearing the High King's crown.

MALACHI.—Do you yourself say that, Brian, son of Cennedigh, or is it only this hot boy that says it?

BRIAN.—I do say it. I say the time has come when there can be but one master in Ireland.

MALACHI.—That is true. Whoever has Tara is master.

BRIAN.—Where the greatest strength is, the Hill of Tara is. My strength has dragged Tara westward.

MALACHI.—This is war then, and the breaking of peace.

BRIAN.—It is rather the beginning of peace.

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MALACHI.—I will raise Connacht against you, I will call to my kinsmen in the North.

GORMLEITH.—Send to Connacht, and the men of Connacht will say they would rather have Brian over them than yourself! Send to the North, and your kinsmen in the North will say as they said before that if Tara was their own they would defend it; but as it is yours you may defend it for yourself, and that is a thing you know you cannot do. You will get no help from the North or any other place against Brian!

MALACHI.—That will be known soon enough.

BRIAN.—If you think you can keep the High Kingship by force, I will give you a truce of a week or a month or a quarter to bring your men together.

MALACHI.—A month will be enough. I will lose no minute. The North and the West will be against you. (*Goes out.*)

BRIAN.—War again! Well, I am ready.

GORMLEITH.—He will get no help. No one will come against you. His own poet has said it in a song. He went East and West, North and South, and he got the same story everywhere. There was no man in all Ireland would raise a hand against King Brian.

BRIAN.—His own poet has said that? Then the sap of power has turned from him to me. The Son of Mary is giving Ireland into my charge. His right hand is stretched over the North, His left hand southward towards the sun, His face is towards the West. His angels have set their ladder upon Usna, Victor angel of Patrick, Axel angel of Columcille, Michael leader of armies. It is a great thing they are doing for me, giving me the help of their sword. Ireland—Ireland, I see you free and prospering; wheat in every tilled field; beautiful vessels in the houses of kings; beautiful children, well nourished in every house. No meddling of strangers within our borders! No outcry of Gael against Gael! (*Stops a moment.*) It is not so. Malachi will get help. Why am I taking the words of a woman, of a song? I have not done with war.

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(Enter *Malachi*.)

BRIAN.—If you have come to ask more time, I will give you a truce of a year.

MALACHI.—A year would be the same to me as a month.

BRIAN.—Do you ask a longer time yet?

MALACHI.—I have a hard thing to say. I will not bring destruction on my people. I take back my boasting words. My luck has turned against me. I have no help to get. Queen Gormleith has spoken the truth.

BRIAN.—You will not fight against me?

MALACHI.—I will keep my sword edge sharp, but it will be against the Gall.

BRIAN.—You would give up the crown?

MALACHI.—I would not, but I must. (*Lays crown on table*.)

BRIAN.—God has given me the power. I am answerable to God. It is for the peace of Ireland I take it.

MAIRE (*softly*).—It is Brian that will bring the great peace!

MALACHI.—That is enough of words. (*Pushes over crown*.) Take it and the weight of it. Yet it was in the prophecy that I should be King after you in Tara!

BRIAN (*takes crown*).—I take it in my hand that is stronger than your hand. I have been chosen to do the work of God. I will bring all Ireland under the one strong rule.

GORMLEITH (*kisses his hand*).—Long live Brian, High King of Ireland!

ALL (*raising their hands*).—Long live the High King!

MALACHI.—I have another word to say. I have another gift for you. The Queen of Tara must not lose the crown of Tara. She must go with it. Take her, Brian. She is cast out of my house. I have no more to do with her. You boast of forcing peace. Can you force a peace on her? Quiet her and I will believe you can master all the wild blood of Ireland.

GORMLEITH.—You offer me in the market. Give me your help, Brian. Is he to say words of insult to me? I was not treated like this among the Danes.

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BRIAN.—I will have no word of insult said to a Queen within these walls.

MALACHI.—She is no Queen now. Let her go out and let her find her place among the witches of the air.

(*He draws his sword and takes a step towards her.*)

BRIAN (*lifting crown over her*)—I give her the shelter of this crown. I give her the shelter of this roof. I take her as I take Ireland, under the power of my name. Brennain, you need not divide these spoils. I offer them all as my first bride-gift to Queen Gormleith.

GORMLEITH.—I thank you, great King.

BRIAN.—See here, Queen, it is no bride gift of a clown I offer you—the great cauldron made by smiths of Murias; the sword of Tethra; the crown of Buan from the well of Cruachan; the brooch of the King of Britain's daughter and her little silver harp; the shining candlestick of Ethne of the Sidhe.

(*All turn to look at spoils except Malachi.*)

RURY (*coming to Malachi*).—The chariot is at the door yet, King. Have you a mind to come away from this, or to stop for the wedding feast?

MALACHI.—I will go; I have been long enough in this little place.

RURY.—Come out then, High King. The horses are rested.

MALACHI (*turns towards door*).—A little place, a little place. We have been in it long enough. It is too small a place for so much buying and selling. Great gains! Great losses! The crown for Brian! The High Kingship for Brian! The spoils of Glenmama for Gormleith! (*Turns from door.*) Who has the worst of it? Brian has that Crow of Battle. (*Exit.*)

*Curtain*

## ACT III

## KINCORA

### ACT III

SCENE I.—*The same hall at Kincora. Gormleith and Sitric sitting at table; Maelmora standing.*

MAELMORA (*holding out his cloak*).—Have you a clasp, Gormleith, to sew on this cloak? The old one is gone from it.

GORMLEITH.—I will do that. How was the old one lost?

MAELMORA.—It was on the journey this morning. My people and the people of the Desi were bringing our tribute of fir-trees; and a dispute arose who should take the lead; and I was not willing there should be any delay, and I put my own shoulder under one of the trees.

GORMLEITH.—You, my brother, carried a load?

MAELMORA.—There was no dispute after that who was to take the lead. But a branch of the tree caught in the clasp, and dragged it off, and it was lost.

GORMLEITH.—You carried King Brian's loan into Kincora! I will sew no clasp upon the cloak.

MAELMORA.—I saw no shame in doing that for Brian. He gave me my life, and my kingdom.

GORMLEITH.—I see great shame in it! I see you all bowing down to Brian's law. There is not a hound of yours dares so much as follow a hare beyond the mearing, without leave from judges or priests. It is not the man that strikes a brave blow that is honored now, but the man that shows obedience; that brings tribute—

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MAELMORA.—Quiet yourself, Gormleith. My mind is not set like yours, on swords and armies. You were wild and restless long ago, dragging me after you from the teachers and the nurses. You have had the tormenting of three husbands since then; leave your brother alone. I am going to the chess-players. Take the cloak, and have the clasp on it when I come again.

(*He gives her the cloak and goes out.*)

GORMLEITH.—I will sew on no clasp! (*Flings it away.*) The fire is the right place for this livery of a hired man!

SITRIC.—I told you this was no place for you; it is with the Danes you should be. The salmon that is used to the salt sea grows sick out there in the still river. You are tangled in the weeds of the river. Break away from them—

GORMLEITH.—I told you I would not give you my help. I have done with the Danes.

SITRIC.—They are coming; they will soon be landing; their plans are made. I have all ready for them at Clontarf; I trusted to you to help. If Maelmora has no power, what power have I? Am I, your son, and Olaf's son, to be a steward and caretaker to the day of my death? Am I to quarry stones for the churches, and shut myself in the schools to read books? I will break from it all. I am no traitor; I was born under the raven.

GORMLEITH.—Go your own way; fight for your own hand. What do you want of me? I am but one woman; there is nothing I can do—

SITRIC (*taking out letters*).—This is what you can do. Look at that letter from Sigurd, Earl of Orkney, and that from Brodar, of the Isle of Man. See what they ask—they will not come without a call from you, without a promise—

GORMLEITH.—I know what they ask. I will not give a promise to either of them.

SITRIC.—I was sure you would help me—you are nearer to me, your son, than to any other.

GORMLEITH.—That is true. Brian is ageing; his strength is going; he is giving up the sword for the mass-book—

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SITRIC.—Brodar and Sigurd sent us messengers—they will send for help for us from Alban—

BRENNAIN (*coming in*).—King Brian is wanting you, Queen, in the inner court, to give a welcome to King Malachi, that is after coming back at last in friendship to Kincora. (*Goes out.*)

GORMLEITH.—Malachi! Is he here again? I have no great mind to see him. But I must go; he will treat me with honor now; he dare not say a word against King Brian's wife.

SITRIC.—I told Brodar I would send him your promise. Give it to me now.

GORMLEITH.—I will give no promise, child; I will not go against you, but I will give you no help against Brian. I am glad if I was a traitor to Malachi; I will never betray Brian. Go to the chess-players. I will go to the Kings.

(*She goes towards door.*)

SITRIC (*putting his hand on her arm*).—Stay—listen—

GORMLEITH.—Leave me; I will not listen. I have taken my own way. I belong to Brian; I will be faithful; I am bound to Kincora. (*They go out.*)

(*Enter Brennain, Derrick, Rury and Phelan.*)

BRENNAIN.—Put the chairs here, for the Kings to rest for a while. (*They set chairs.*) They will be going out then to see the army do its feats, where it is gathered on the green to do honor to King Malachi.

RURY.—What way is Queen Gormleith? Does Brian curb her better than Malachi?

BRENNAIN.—What way would he curb her, having, as he has, his head in the skies, and his hand in every good work? No matter; no matter; we have more than the bitting of mares to attend to here. Tribute coming from every side, from the Gael and from the Gall! Wine, and cattle, and riches! Painted books and golden vessels from the King of Alban, and the King of Lochlann, and all the kings of the western world! We will have to widen our walls to store the whole of it.

RURY.—You will; and if you have your way, Brennain, you

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will have to widen Ireland to hold Kincora; and to widen the whole world to hold Ireland. Age makes you as full of pride as a tree is of branches.

DERRICK.—Golden birds among the branches  
And another in the hand;  
Keenings not used, or treachery  
In the tilled familiar land.

PHELAN.—Whatever wits poor Derrick ever had they are gone from him in his age.

DERRICK.—The King praised that song a while ago. He said it had worked itself into his dreams. He had a dream last night—

RURY.—I wonder a man that has done such great deeds as Brian would give any heed to dreams.

DERRICK.—Don't you know that every noticeable thing a man does is but the certain sign of the going and coming of dreams? Wrack thrown upon the rocks by the high tide—leaves heaped together in a hollow by the wind.

RURY.—It is a wisp of withered leaves your own thoughts are, Derrick; and if you have any noticeable thing to do, you had best make no delay, or it is your ghost that will be doing it in the churchyard, knocking a start out of men and beasts.

BRENNAIN.—I hear some voices outside, and shouting. It should be more tribute coming.

PHELAN.—More likely it is your own daughter Maire. I passed her upon the road a while ago, and a crowd following her and talking with her.

BRENNAIN (*starting up*).—My daughter Maire!

PHELAN.—Your daughter Maire. What great wonder is there in that? I did not say it was the King of Greece I saw, or St. Martin of France in a cloud of heaven.

RURY (*to Phelan*).—Did you never hear his daughter Maire has been lost to him this long time?

(*Maire appears in the doorway*.)

MAIRE.—I am come back to you, father.

BRENNAIN (*hobbling across to meet her*).—Keep back there!

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I will not let you into the King's hall till I know where you spent the time!

MAIRE.—It was well spent. I went a long way—

BRENNAIN.—How do I know are you fit to come into the King's house at all? Wearing all your jewels that would buy half the cows in Kerry—dressed out like the rag-bush of a blessed well!

MAIRE.—You will give me a good welcome if you will but listen—

BRENNAIN.—I am thinking it is stuck in the mud of the river you were, or drifting out with the tide, and the beasts of the sea picking at you—

MAIRE.—Listen, till I tell you—

BRENNAIN.—Leaving me without one to will my little riches to! I have a mind to turn you out in earnest.

MAIRE.—You will be proud. Did you hear the people shouting to make much of me?

BRENNAIN.—The people! What do I care for the shouting of that troop? They would shout to see a river-rat crossing the highway! It is what the king thinks, and what I myself think, that matters.

MAIRE.—Let me tell what I have to tell—

DERRICK.—Here are the kings.

(*Brian, Malachi and Gormleith come in.*)

BRIAN.—What is all this?

DERRICK.—It is Brennain's daughter come back to him.

BRIAN.—Is Maire come back?

MAIRE.—My father will not let me in, High King. He will not listen to my story.

BRIAN.—Tell your story to me and to the Queen. Sit here beside me, Malachi.

(*They sit down. Brian puts Malachi at his right hand. Gormleith sits left of Brian.*)

BRENNAIN.—That is too much honor for her.

KINCORA

MAIRE (*coming forward*).—It was on your own business and to bear witness for you I went, High King.

GORMLEITH (*scornfully*).—How could you bear witness for the High King?

MAIRE.—There used to be talk among strangers coming here about King Brian and his rule and his great sway, that had put down every bad thing.

MALACHI.—The Danes are well put down anyway. There is no one in all Ireland will stoop the back to till the ground or grind a quern, but all putting a man or a woman of the Danes to do the work in their place.

BRIAN.—I wish I could be sure the provinces have as little stir in them as the Danes. There were some stories of robbery—

MAIRE.—That is what they said, High King. They said it was not true you had brought all Ireland to freedom and to peace; and I said it was true.

GORMLEITH.—What has this talk to do with your journey?

MAIRE.—They dared me, then, to travel through the whole country. And so I set out and went through the five provinces —to Toraigh in the North, and from that again to Cliodhna's Wave in the South, alone, and having this great treasure with me. (*She holds up arm-ring.*)

BRIAN.—Did no one meddle with you?

MAIRE.—No one at all. When I was passing through Connacht, there were young men riding on horses, and they came as if to take me. But then they said: 'We will leave her free, seeing we ourselves are free, and all Ireland is free.'

BRENNAIN.—That is good. That is good. If Connacht is quiet, all Ireland is quiet.

MAIRE.—When I came into Ulster, I saw a troop of rough men, and one of them said: 'It is no harm to rob this girl that is of the province of Munster.' But another man of them said: 'Do not, for it is not to the north or the south we belong now, but to the whole of Ireland.' And so I came safely through all, and for that, King Brian, I thank God and you!

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BRIAN (*rising*).—That is a great thing you have done, and a great story you have brought me. Many a woman has sat beside a king through her lifetime and has done less than this to be remembered by. (*He takes her hand and leads her to Gormleith.*) What great reward, Queen, should be given to this messenger of peace?

GORMLEITH.—I have rewarded too many who came back from your battles to have any words now. Ask those who keep the King's treasure and his riches.

MAIRE.—High King, I give you back your ring. It was for your own service I wore it.

BRIAN.—I will give you your choice of rings and jewels in its place, but I will keep this one. I will bid the goldsmiths set it in a shield as a sign of unbroken peace, of all Ireland at one. Show it to the goldsmith, Maire, that he may make a pattern for the shield. (*Maire takes it, and goes out.*) See, at last, at last, I can put away my sword. (*Hangs up sword on the rack and sits down again.*) This great new peace was made for me beyond the world. I saw it all in a dream last night. I saw in my dream a woman coming to me that was Aoibhell of the Grey Rock. She came, and she called to me, and swept the darkness away, and showed me the whole country, shining and beautiful, an image of the face of God in the smooth sea. All bad things had gone from it like plover to the north at the strengthening of the sun. The rowan-berries upon Slieve Echtge were the lasting fruits of heaven; I could hear the joyful singing of the birds of the Land of Promise. The Gael had grown to be fitting comrades for the white angels.

MALACHI.—That was a good vision. It must have some meaning.

BRIAN.—It went from me then, and I cried out after it; but Aoibhell said, 'It is only at Clontarf you will come again to that vision and to that lasting peace.'

MALACHI.—Why did she say Clontarf, I wonder?

BRIAN.—It is often dreams have not a straight meaning, or

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waking breaks it. It is here at Kincora I have had a witness to the perfect peace, and not at Clontarf. (*He turns to Gormleith.*) Now we can do great things for Ireland—

MALACHI.—You have done that already. Bridges over every river, roads through every bog, churches the best in the whole world.

BRIAN.—The churches I make now will shine like the candles of a king's house. The whole of Ireland will be a silver-walled dun of the angels.

BRENNAIN (*who has gone to the window*).—The men of the army are gathered on the green yet.

BRIAN (*rises*).—Come, Malachi, they are there to welcome you. This is the last time they may be gathered there. The old fighting men or those that have business to mind or children to rear may go home—there is no more work for them; I will break up the army.

(*Malachi, followed by Brennain and Derrick, goes out right. Gormleith keeps back Brian.*)

GORMLEITH.—You are not going to break up the army?

BRIAN.—There is no work for them in Ireland. They are all free to put roofs on their houses again, and turn back the wild fields to apple-gardens.

GORMLEITH.—That is no work for you to put your hand to! I came here to see you make your name the greatest in the world—the greatest that ever was in the world.

BRIAN.—I thought to do that once, but age has come upon me. I am satisfied to do the wide, lasting works of age.

GORMLEITH.—We of the high race need never give in to age! Our fathers mated with the gods, and took immortal wives! Do not give in to it, Brian; age is ugly and miserable, withering the hand that has given up the sword! Come out looking for strong men holding walled islands—islands with strange laughing armies—armies of tall, unconquered men. (*Brian shakes his head, and puts her from him.*) Bring out, then, the Cross you boast of! Carry it to the gardens of the east of the world!

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Strike at the people of the old gods. Try its strength against those you call the false gods. I will go with you. I will be obedient to you—my pride will be in you—do not keep me in the narrow roads!

BRIAN (*taking her hand from his arm, and touching her hair with his other hand*).—Have I and time not quieted this whirling heart? Make yourself ready for the feast by-and-by; put on your silks and your jewels; your eyes are shining—you will shine out at the feast.

(*Gormleith lets him go, and turns away. He goes out. Maire comes back and lays ring on table.*)

GORMLEITH.—I tried to waken him, but he is in his sleep. The sleep of age has come upon him. I have done with Kincora! The people of Ireland have surely lost their wits.—My brother carrying wood! Brian breaking up his army, building churches and bell-towers, sending his ships searching for books and parchments! You, Maire, leaving the feasts and the songs, and the troops of fighting-men, to go wandering like a strayed heifer, hurrying from road to road, through the whole country—wasting your young days in foolishness.

MAIRE.—The king praised me for bringing news of peace. I am well satisfied to have made the journey for King Brian.

GORMLETH.—Satisfied! It is a strange thing to get satisfaction from a journey like that. When I was your age I would have thought it a shameful journey to have made! I would have thought it a poor, and a weak, and a shameful country that I could ride through without leaving fire in the hearts of those that met me, and red steel in their hands, and the seed of a war in every province.

MAIRE.—O Queen, that is a terrible thing to say!

GORMLEITH.—The heart is gone out from the young men of Ireland, and the blood from their bodies, and the daring from their lips, with their talk of peace and of learning. There is no praise now but for foolish messengers, and for monks and for saints—old, white-haired saints, with psalms and with fasting.

I am sick of this country of bells and churches—little walled-in churches. My churches are the hill-tops, blazing at the coming of the sun, the plains flaming with fire through the night-time. I am for the gods that head great armies! (*Sitric and Maelmora come in.*) Go, girl, and serve the King of Leinster's woodcutters, as is the fashion! Take down the spears that are rusting in the racks! Put up the saws and the hatchets in their places! (*Maire goes out frightened.*) Are you back again, Maelmora? Why are you not splitting wood with the kitchen clowns?

MAELMORA.—This is a good welcome I am getting in Kincora. Insults from you, and insults from Murrough.

GORMLEITH.—What did you do to anger your master's son?

SITRIC.—He was watching Murrough at the chess, and he gave an advice, and Murrough took it, and lost the game, and that angered him.

MAELMORA.—I would not stop to listen to what he said. He had no right to say words of insult.

GORMLEITH.—No wonder he said them. Age is coming on you—age and sleep, and a coward's heart. It is certain you and Ireland were never under bonds till now.

SITRIC.—I think you will sign these letters now, Queen, that you would not sign a while ago.

GORMLEITH.—Give them here to me! I will put my name to them. (*Takes letters.*)

MAELMORA.—What is it you are doing, Gormleith?

GORMLEITH.—I will tell you that. I am breaking away from Brian. I am breaking Brian's peace.

MAELMORA.—You would not do that—you, his wife!

GORMLEITH.—It was to a great fighting man I came as a wife—not to a builder of bell-towers and altars.

SITRIC.—Here is the pen.

GORMLEITH.—No, no; I cannot sign. Brian is the bravest of the men I came to. A while ago, when I saw him here with Malachi—Malachi, that is to him as clay to crystal—I thought

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to waken him; to save him from sleep; to keep the armies; to give him the headship of the world. I might do it yet—

SITRIC.—Sign the letters; there is no time to lose.

MAELMORA.—This is treachery. I will go and call to Brian!

GORMLEITH.—Call him if you will. He will not forgive us. Does it matter? Death is an easy thing.

SITRIC (*taking up ring*).—Are you, too, bound in this ring of peace?

GORMLEITH.—That ring! I was forgetting it! I will sign the letters—and here. (*Signs the letters. Sitric takes them up.*) Brian is old! All the people of Kincora are old, or rusting, or in their sleep. Let them make much of the linnet in the cage; the hawk will leave them for the free air! I will not stay in this place of saints and of traders. (*She gets up.*)

MAELMORA.—Where are you going?

GORMLEITH.—I am going to Clontarf, to give my help to the armies of the Gall that are on the sea now, coming to Ireland!

MAELMORA.—You will not do that! I will hold you here! I will never let my sister be a traitor in the King's house!

GORMLEITH.—Be a king, Maelmora, and no man's servant! You, yourself, and Sitric would keep Ireland against the whole world. (*Maelmora breaks away.*) Go, then, and humble yourself before Brian, and before his son—let the son of the Connacht woman put loads on your son.

(*Murrough comes in. Sitric goes quickly out, hiding the letters.*)

MURROUGH.—Are you giving advice to the Queen, Maelmora, as you gave it to me a while ago? I am ashamed that you vexed me then, but she seems twenty times more vexed.

MAELMORA.—It is the Queen that is giving advice to me—it may be better for you if I do not take it.

MURROUGH.—I have no skill in riddles—but if there is some threat in your voice, I will answer it.

MAELMORA.—Take care what you say. Your father's name will not save you, as it did when you spoke a while ago.

GORMLEITH (*to Murrough*).—What was it you said?

MURROUGH.—I said the King of Leinster was well able to give advice. I said it was good advice he gave his comrades, the Danes, the day they ran from us like scared sheep at Glenmama!

MAELMORA (*to Murrough*).—It may happen to us yet to meet in another battle, where it is not my men, but your own men that will run like scared sheep!

MURROUGH.—When that battle is coming, King, see there is a good yew tree near the battlefield, where you can hide yourself while your army is running, as you hid yourself at Glenmama!

MAELMORA (*half drawing sword*).—I will not shed blood here —my answer will be in the battle.

MURROUGH.—That battle will not be sooner than I wish it!

MAELMORA.—It will be sooner than you think! I am going to it now. (*He goes towards door.*)

MURROUGH.—That is great news! But it is not true. Our enemies only plot and plan now; they do not come into open fight.

MAELMORA.—You cannot say that again. They are coming out now into open fight.

MURROUGH.—From their hiding-places? No, they will be afraid.

MAELMORA.—Those that are coming against you now will not run from you! The great armies of the Gall are coming against you this time. They will sweep you and your house out of Ireland before them! They are on the sea now, coming to Clontarf!

MURROGH.—That is idle talk. They would have a rough landing. Sitric would bring his men from Ath Cliath—Sitric! He has gone out! Brian should have struck the head off that sullen Dane.

GORMLEITH.—Sitric is young; he has not lost his courage with age, or with idleness. His heart is the highest—he will master you; he will master Ireland! It is to help him I have called

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in the Gall. The old have had their time; it is for you and Sitric now to play the game.

MAELMORA.—This is no place for us now. It is time for us to be gone.

(*Turns to door, and holds out his hand to Gormleith.*)

MURROUGH (*drawing his sword, and putting his arm across door.*) Treachery! Treachery to the King! Here to me, friends of the King!

GORMLEITH.—There is no need of your sword. I would not leave this house secretly.

(*Brian, Malachi and servants come in.*)

BRIAN.—What is this cry of treachery in my house?

MURROUGH.—The armies of the Gall are on their way to Ireland. There are rebels to welcome them. Sitric is rising up against you. It is from your own house the word has been sent.

BRIAN.—I would take no man's word for that.

MURROUGH.—The traitors are here, before you.

BRIAN (*to Maelmora*).—Have you taken part in this treachery? (*Maelmora is silent.*)

MURROUGH.—Maelmora is in it—but—this is a hard thing for you to hear. It is your own wife that has stirred it up.

BRIAN.—Let me hear no word of wife or kindred. You are speaking to the High King of Ireland.

MURROUGH.—Give them the wages of their work. My work is to make ready to meet the Dane. (*He goes out.*)

BRIAN.—Queen Gormleith, you hear what he has said. Give your answer.

GORMLEITH.—What have I to say? Murrough has said it.

BRIAN.—It is not true. You are trying to screen Sitric—

GORMLEITH.—What Murrough has told you is true. Is it all my fault? You could have stopped me—I bade you go out and conquer the world. You would not—you have listened to the monks too long for that—it was a pity. Here, you may save your peace yet; the armies may be turned back. I hold out my hands

to you—I bid you bind them; call for your men—let them bind me and put me to death!

BRIAN.—Go! I do not make war upon women, but upon armies.

GORMLEITH.—You do not understand—there are great hosts coming, the hosts of the Black Lochlannachs and of the White Lochlannachs, the men of Leodus and of Skye, and the trading men of the Bretons, and a thousand of the best fighters of the Black Danes—they look to me to welcome them—they may turn back if I am not there—

BRIAN.—It is folly to think your life or death could change the course of such a host!

MALACHI.—Great God of heaven! Ireland has never faced such a danger!

GORMLEITH.—Listen to him, Brian! He will tell you how to deal with me.

MALACHI.—King, take her at her word; put her to death. I no longer speak in anger. I do not know who this woman is, whether she is of mortal birth, or outside the race of men—but this I do know, that while she is living there can be no peace in the world.

(*Brian points to the door.*)

GORMLEITH.—If it is some affection for me that keeps you from taking my life, put it out of your heart. You will not take me at my word, High King? I will tell you all the truth. Brodar, of Mananaan's Island, would not come against you unless I promised him my love, and I promised it. Sigurd, Earl of Orkney, asked the same promise, and I gave it (*laughs*). I will not stay and die. I will go out to meet them. I would not for the wealth of the world miss being there when Brodar finds out—when Sigurd finds out—that I have promised myself to each of them. Ah! how their eyes will glitter! How their hands will clutch at the sword hilt. (*Puts hand on his shoulder.*) King, am I not a right wife to show mercy to! A right wife! Yet it is for me men break the peace of the world. (*He*

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*turns away.) You were asleep; I tried to waken you. You chose to stay in your sleep. (She goes to door; signs to Maelmora to go out.) You have chosen it, King. You have chosen it; not I, not I. It is you have chosen it. (She goes out, and her voice is heard in a shriek.) He has chosen it! He has chosen it!*

BRIAN.—It is I myself have betrayed my people. The blame is on me. (*He half kneels at table, covering his face with his hands.*) War, war, keening and treachery. Ireland red again. Red and stained through and through. Blood! blood! and war!

MALACHI.—Have your orders ready for the army, Brian.

BRIAN.—Is all ready for the Queen's journey? Give her the horses from Iar Connacht—

MALACHI.—Listen to what I say. We must send messengers.

BRIAN.—The speckled horses—she liked them best; and the carved chariot from the north.

MALACHI.—Listen, Brian. (*Puts his hand on Brian's shoulder.*)

BRIAN.—But who was it—who was it that called in the Gall?

MALACHI.—I cannot rouse him. No wonder. That treachery was too hard a blow.

(*Murrough comes in with standard in hand, and stands on threshold. Spears and banners appear at window. War march is played.*)

BRIAN.—But what did she mean? What did Aoibhell of the Sidhe mean? She promised me lasting peace—lasting peace—lasting peace. She told it to me in my dream. (*He gets up, and walks up and down.*) What did she mean? Is there no truth? Is everyone treacherous? (*He comes face to face with Murrough, and stands still.*)

MURROUGH.—The army is ready. We must lead it to Clontarf.

BRIAN (*standing very strong and straight.*) Clontarf! Now I know what Aoibhell meant! She said it was at Clontarf I should find peace. That is well. My place is ready in the long procession. Cathal, son of Aedh; Corc, son of Anluan; Lorcan,

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son of Luchta; Mahon, son of Cennedigh; all the race of Lugaiddh reigned in this place, and went out of this door for the last time, and the traitors that betrayed them, and the women they loved. Give me my sword. (*Malachi takes it down and gives it to him.*) It has another battle to win.

SCENE 2—*A wood at Clontarf. Gormleith, Brodar, Sitric, and another Dane crossing to right as if in retreat.*

SITRIC.—Come this way, Brodar. We must put courage into the men of Ath Cliath! The men of Connacht have driven them back from the ridge.

BRODAR.—The heart has gone out of them since Maelmora was killed.

DANE.—Murrough and his Dalcassians are close upon us. We cannot face them till we get the help of what are left of our own men.

SITRIC.—Come, Queen, and call to the men of Leinster. It is for you to take Maelmora's place.

GORMLEITH.—I will stay while I have a spear left to cast at some foolhardy enemy that is breaking through the wood. Go to his heart, swift messenger, beak of eagle, teeth of wolf. (*Throws a spear.*) Search out his secrets! Let out his rage! Sure love-token, bring him to my feet. (*Throws another.*) Darken his eyes! Whiten his face! Redden the grass!

BRODAR.—Come on to our men. We may save the day yet.

SITRIC.—The Danes will not fail us. They will gather to us. We will sweep away Murrough and his men.

GORMLEITH (*throwing another spear*).—My grief! that is the last of my spears. Go, good messenger, do my bidding.

(*They go out. Enter Murrough. He staggers and sinks on one knee.*)

MURROUGH.—Ah! these wounds! I did not know they had gone so deep! Come to me, men of Kincora! Have I outrun you all?

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*(Sinks down, with head on elbow, and lies quiet for a moment. Aoibhell appears.)*

AOIBHELL.—I am come to your help, Murrough, son of Brian. I will give you healing from the well of healing that is in the hidden places of the Sidhe.

MURROUGH (*looks up*).—Who is there? Who is speaking? Is that another of the enemies of the King?

AOIBHELL.—No enemy, Murrough, but a friend to you and to your race. I am Aoibhell of the Grey Rock. It is long I have watched over Kincora. I have watched over you. I have come to befriend you.

MURROUGH.—Call to my men. They will help me. I must get on to the battle. I must drive the Gall to the sea—into the sea. Brodar must not escape me. Brodar and his mate—(*Struggles to rise, but groans and falls again.*)

AOIBHELL.—Quit the battle at my asking, Murrough, son of Brian, or your proud blood will be on the ground before to-morrow.

MURROUGH.—I will not do that, Aoibhell of the Grey Rock; and I will tell you a little true story, that fear for my own life will never make me turn my face. And if I fall, the Gall will fall with me; and many a man will fall by my own hand, and their strong places will be divided by the Gael.

AOIBHELL.—I, who know hidden things, know you must fall this day unless you come with me now to the happy country of all delights. And, indeed, Murrough, it is soon for you to die; and it is little time you have had for joy or for pleasure; your young youth worn away between the hard will of these great ones, the stirrings and strivings of the war-woman and the state-craft of the man of peace. Come with me now, and I will show you joys you have never known. I will give you the never-ending, never-lessening life.

MURROUGH.—It is often before now I was offered that life and these gifts, in the hills and in houses of the Sidhe; but I never gave up for one night my country or my inheritance for them.

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AOIBHELL.—No wasting will come upon you. Sweet music, playing and drinking, beauty, riches, love and power; they are waiting for you in the Country of the Young.

MURROUGH.—No wasting; no weakness; no withering of strength. There is weakness coming on me now.

AOIBHELL.—You have had so little. Do not lose all for the sake of one hour; of a few blows in the battle.

MURROUGH.—A few blows in the battle—a few blows (*rousing himself*); a few blows upon the enemies of Ireland! Ah! that is life. That is the life I want! Not the sluggish life; the feasting and the drinking; the love of soft hands and yellow hair; the sleepy songs and the pillows. (*Struggles to his knees, and holds up hilt of his sword.*) That is not the peace Brian fought for! That is not a life for a Christianed man! Go out! go out from me, tempter!

(*Aoibhell disappears. Enter Brennain and Rury.*)

BRENNAIN.—The Dalcassians are at the edge of the wood. They have put down the Leinster men. The Danes are running to the sea like cattle in the heats of summer.

RURY.—You would never think them to be fighting-men in the sharp wind of the Day of the Crucifixion.

BRENNAIN.—The King sent word of you. Oh! you are wounded. (*Kneels and looks at wounds.*)

MURROUGH.—Bind up the wounds. I must go to the battle. A demon has been here in this place tempting me. Out with them! out with them! It is time to have done with those witches of the air; some stirring up by their mischief the wars that should be the scourge of God; some calling us to the sluggish beds and the drinking-house! Out with you! Out with you all! (*Raises himself with Brennain's help.*) And if I must die this day, I have not had my fill of fighting; and I pray God and St. Michael I may cast my spear yet at your vain whirling hosts from the ranks of the angels! (*A wail heard from where Aoibhell has disappeared.*) Out with all heathen things in the world or out

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of it! Out I say, out I say with every heathen thing! (*Rushes out.*)

SCENE 3—*Before Brian's tent. Brian, Brennain and Maire.*

BRIAN (*coming out of tent*). Have the Danes made any stand, or are they still making for the sea?

BRENNAIN.—There are none standing, unless those that have reached the sea. They must stand, for the tide has taken their ships from them.

BRIAN.—Is Malachi safe?

BRENNAIN.—Safe and well. He has a strong ditch between him and the Gall. There is no fear for Malachi. He will outlast the battle.

BRIAN.—He will outlast us all. That was in the prophecy. He will outlast us all.

BRENNAIN.—O'Hynes and the men of Connacht are doing great deeds. There are no traitors among us but the men of Meath.

BRIAN.—Can you see Murrough's banner?

MAIRE.—I see it well. It has gone through the battle westward. It is standing yet; but the armies of the Danes, where it passed, are like a wood struck by the storm.

BRIAN.—I think I see it. They are giving way before him on every side. The victory is won. The battle is won. Peace at last! I leave the sod of Ireland free of the Gall.

MAIRE.—I will go with this milk to the wounded men. (*Exit.*)

BRIAN.—Go, Brennain, and call to Murrough. Bid him to come back to me, now his work is done. I would speak with him again. I thought this day would have parted us; but it has been shown to me that we two will sleep in the one bed to-night. (*Brennain goes out.*) I will give thanks to God. *Laus Deus.* (*He raises curtain of tent and goes in, letting it fall behind him.* His voice heard repeating Latin psalm.

*Enter Brodar and a Dane.*

DANE (*looking back*).—Run, Brodar, run. The men of Connacht are close upon us. Let us get to the shelter of the wood.

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BRODAR (*turning back as he goes*).—There is some priest in this tent praying against us. I will silence him. (*Goes into tent. Comes out, wiping sword on curtain of tent.*) These priests that war with words must be answered with steel.

DANE.—We have outrun the Queen.

BRODAR.—She had best not wait for her son's burying (*Enter Gormleith.*) Faster, Queen. There will be little mercy for you this time, if you are taken to Kincora.

GORMLEITH.—Who is there?

BRODAR.—Some prating bishop. I have made an end of his mutterings.

GORMLEITH.—It is Brian's shield. (*Looks in.*) Oh! it is the king. You have killed King Brian.

DANE.—That was a good chance. It makes up for great losses. (*Shouts heard.*)

BRODAR.—They are gaining on us. Come, Queen.

GORMLEITH (*going into tent*).—I will not leave him like that. (*Turns back.*) No! No! No traitor's hand must touch him. Brodar, you were his enemy, but you were not a traitor. Lay him straight. Set his feet together, as befits a king.

(*Brodar and Dane go in, and come out, drawing back curtain. Brian is seen laid out on a bed.*)

GORMLEITH.—You gave me a great bride-gift, Brian. Have I not given you a great gift for it? I have brought to every man I came to war and stirring of blood, but I brought this best gift to you. I did not leave you to die as a beast dies, sick and dumb in the darkness. I gave you the death of the great men in the high sounds of a battle.

(*Shouts heard nearer.*)

BRODAR (*seizing her*).—Come! come! They are overtaking us.

GORMLEITH.—Oh! I will come; I will come. From this time out I must go from country to country, driven by rough winds over rough seas; driven from place to place, with beaten men. (*They drag her away; she turns as she goes out.*) My thousand farewells to you, Brian of the victories!

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*(As they go, a sound of keening is heard. Enter Maire, Brennain, and Derrick, carrying Murrough's shield and banner.)*

MAIRE.—Oh! who is to tell King Brian that Murrough is cut down—the blossomed branch!

BRENNAIN.—My grief! Whoever tells him that will have killed his peace forever.

*(Maire goes to tent; looks in; turns to them, crossing her hands on her breast.)*

MAIRE.—Give great praise to God. The lasting peace of Brian is unbroken.

*Curtain*





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